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SUBJECT: CALM RETURNS TO MONROVIA CENTRAL PRISON AFTER
JAILBREAK

REF: MONROVIA 977

Classified By: Ambassador Linda-Thomas Greenfield for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (SBU) Calm has returned to the Monrovia Central Prison following a jailbreak December 1 (reftel). UNMIL Police (UNPOL) Commissioner Henrik Stiernblad told Emboffs December 2 that a total of 202 prisoners escaped the prison. A total of 64 people were arrested in the ensuing search, but in fact 28 of those arrested turned out not to be prisoners and were released, leaving the total number of recaptured prisoners as of December 2 at 36.

2. (SBU) According to Stiernblad, the events began as a riot by prisoners over the lack of court dates and poor prison conditions. The prisoners broke into a tool shed which stored shovels and machetes, and quickly overpowered prison guards who fled the scene. A Nepalese UNPOL Formed Police Unit (FPU) platoon stayed at the main gate and using tear gas (nine canisters) and warning shots, attempted to keep the prisoners within the walls of the prison. However, other UNMIL personnel, in an effort to save a vehicle from destruction, opened another gate to remove the vehicle, thus allowing the majority of prisoners to escape through the open gate. Other prisoners scaled the prison walls. At the time of the prison break, only three Liberia National Police (LNP) officers were on duty at the prison.

3. (SBU) Stiernblad said that the Nepalese FPU had requested reinforcements, but they had not arrived in time. Currently there are three FPU platoons guarding inside the prison with a platoon from the Nigerian UNMIL Battalion guarding the perimeter.

4. (SBU) The LNP is continuing its search. The Emergency Response Unit (ERU) was deployed several hours after the break to conduct perimeter searches of neighborhoods but did not make any arrests. There appears to have been some cooperation between UNMIL and the LNP on the dragnet in the ensuing hours, but it is still unclear how well coordinated it was. UNMIL personnel manned checkpoints, but did not assist the LNP in neighborhood searches. UNPOL (including ERU) advisors were present, however. Stiernblad said that UNMIL was planning to work out an operational plan with the LNP to conduct a more thorough search.

5. (U) Press accounts state that some of the prisoners broke into nearby homes to steal clothes and otherwise loot the homes. The press has also made a link between guards' recent grievances over pay, and the possibility of some type of collusion, but there has been no direct evidence of that.

6. (C) Stiernblad admitted that the prison break has put the UN in a difficult position as it was clear that, because of the overcrowded conditions and the long pre-trial detentions, the prisoners' human rights were being violated, and by helping to maintain the prison and recapturing the prisoners, the UN may be seen as complicit. He said the UN will conduct an investigation to determine whether any failure of UNMIL

contributed to the jailbreak.

17. (SBU) Comment: The prison break occurred at a traditional period of increased crime (Christmas season) so we expect an uptick in crime soon, but it will be difficult to determine the cause. The delay in deploying the ERU indicates that some improvement in the deployment order process is required.
THOMAS-GREENFIELD